A GUIDE TO PLAINSONG

(GREGORIAN CHANT)

Two Essays and Five Handouts by

David G. Jensen

Plainsong is the prayer-music of the Western Church, but it is universally understood.

It is not a means of expression, but a mode of knowledge which far surpasses understanding.

Plainsong refuses no one, and freely offers what it has to give. It is an experience, and not an artifact.

ESSAYS

Plainsong is Plain Speech [Jensen] 1.0.pdf

    reverent, but not fussy

Plainsong, not Performance [Jensen] 1.0.pdf

    simple (not casual) suggestions for use in worship

HANDOUTS FOR SCHOLA OR CHOIR

How to Read Gregorian Chant [Jensen] 1.0.pdf

Gregorian Modes [Jensen] 1.0.pdf

How to Sing Gregorian Chant [Jensen] 1.0.pdf

How to Chant the Psalms [Jensen] 1.0.pdf

Pronunciation of Ecclesiastical Latin, The [Jensen] 1.0

VERSION 1.0 OF THIS BOOKLET
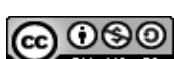
Plainsong is Plain Speech

by David G. Jensen

I will sing with the spirit, I will sing also with the understanding. (*I Corinthinans* 14:15, DRA)

Plainsong (Lat. *cantus planus*), describes several related traditions, of which the best known is Gregorian Chant. The latter term is better understood in that context. Pope St. Gregory I, the Great (*c.* 540–604) edited and anthologized the chants in common use; he did not compose them. Plain speech does not require bombast or bullying. It is simply the use of concise, accurate language to communicate what the speaker intends. Some of the old prayers are quite concise: "Save, Lord; we perish." (*Mat.* 8:25). Does that preclude metaphor? "But I am a worm, and no man." (*Psalm* 22:6). Is explication only obfuscation? Does plainsong, then, mean: one note = one syllable? Apparently not.

What if plainsong is not an adornment of the text, but rather is part of the message? What if plainsong *is* prayer? The answer to these questions is better realized in experience than by explanation. The words require care. The music requires care. Sing with all the more attention and reverence when the two are really parts of the same thing, a fact attested since the foundation of Holy Church.

NOTE: All singing can be fairly described as a form of speech. All speech is tonal. The term here is used in the musical sense (relative intervals) rather than semantic (alterations in pitch to specify meaning). In the former sense, singing simply prolongs a tone. A melody assigns various intervals to (and within) successive syllables.

The method described following is not original with the writer, whose intention is to share what was given.

The method can be summarized thus:

Sing from the Text.

How? An abstract list of criteria, however valid, would appear overly complex, and be difficult to apply. The specific details of rehearsal are the product of regular practice rather than prescription. Thus the particular habits of each group may vary.. The basic principle stated above,, then, may be illustratd best by application to a particular example:

St. Ignatius of Loyola (July 31, Old Calendar)
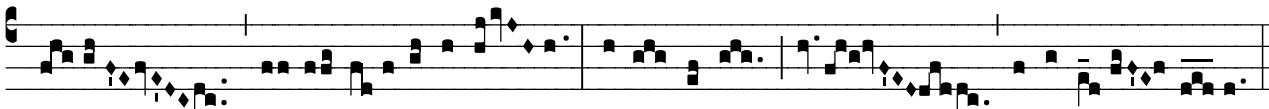
CO.I   I - gnem   ve - ni mit-te-re in ter - ram : et quid vo - lo,   ni - si   ut ac-cen - dá-tur?

"I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I, but that it be kindled?" (*Luc.* 12:49, DRC)

Brief notice of the translation, when available, is advisable to provide at least a general sense of the meaning of the text.

Í-gněm vé-ni mít-tě-rè ̗ ĭn **tér**-răm : ět quìd vó-lŏ, ní-sĭ ùt àc-cěn-**dá**-tŭr?

The group may then recite the text together, slowly and carefully, to achieve unison (which is only attained by careful listerning), to agree on and to be comfortable with the pronunciation: and, indispensably, to note the relative degrees of stress (accent) and their pattern within the text. Like English, Liturgical Latin has three accents (degrees of stress), rather than only two as is sometimes claimed..These consist of primary stress, secondary stress and unstressed. They are indicated by these signs:

prímary stress ´ ; secondary srress ` ; unstressed ˘

These can be distinguished in the final word of the text cited above:

àccěndátŭr

Observe also that a usually unstressed syllable may attain secondary stress in relation to the words that follow:

quìd vó-lŏ
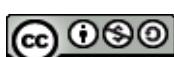
The primary stress in each half of the text is indicated in boldface:

tér-răm

A curve between vowels in successive words: rè‿ĭn indicates *elision* (noun; verb *elide*); the words are not separated by a pause, in particular not by a glottal stop (the "uh" sound).

When familiar and comfortable with the text, attention then may be directed to the accompanying plainsong:

CO. ("Communion") indicates that the antiphon is sung when the celebrant receives communion during Holy Mass.

The Roman numeral I indicates Mode I: the final (tonic) note is *re*; the range is about a octave above the final (here includes the 7th below); and the enor (reciting note) is *la,* a fifth above the final (mostly the case here). The *do* clef locates that interval on the top line, and the other intervals are reckoned in relation to it; thus the opening note is *fa.*

Rhythm and tempo approximate those of speech. A *punctum* (square note) equals about a syllable (a single beat), and can be lengthened by an *episema* (a line over the note(s) about half, and doubled by a following dot. It cannot be overemphasized, however, that duration is *not* absolute, but *relative* and *variable.* It is a common error, a habit acquired from standard-practice notation, to try to quantify the rhythm and to apply a fixed duration (whether long or short) to each note. The effect is mechanical and rote, and reinforces the popular stereotype of Gregorian Chant. It smothers the content and depth implicit in the music as well as the text. This content and depth constitute the beauty of Chant..

The overriding technique in the phrasing of Chant is *crescendo-decrescendo,* which can be illustrated by a bell curve. It is applied first to the entire antiphon, then to each half of the text, and then in successively lesser degrees to each phrase, to each word within the phrase, and finally to each syllable within the word. This is a general principle, and almost impossible to oberve to the finest detail. With practice the idea becomes habitual, and can be applied with varying degrees of specificity, to significant phrases, and in particular to cadences, most importantly the final cadence. Attention can then be given to the "counterpoint" of textual and musical accent mentioned above.
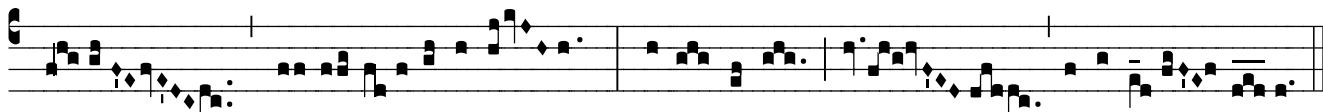
1. I - gnem   2. ve - ni mit-te-re in ter - ram 3. et quid vo - lo,   ni - si ut ac-cen - dá-tur?

1. ' I ', the first syllable of 'Ignem' (fire), is stressed. As the opening syllable,though, it is entered slowly and gradually. Moreover, ' gnem ' , the second and unstressed syllable, has a lengthy *melisama* (pl. *melismata;* a group of more than several notes on a single syllable), and yet should receive less emphasis than its predecessor. This requires considerable vocal juggling, and there is no algorithm to balance these factors. Then consider the multiple musical accents in relation to the single word: on the second, fourth, sixth (note the *ictus*), eighth and twelfth notes, which do not receive equal emphasis, but are correlated according to the forementioned considerations. The sum of these might appear overwhelming; a certain amount, though, is instinct rather than artifice, or habit acquired by practice, as mentioned above. Yet consideration of the whole does reveal the depth of these compositions, which might otherwise be dismissed as merely decorative.

2. In its second quarter, the melody now proceeds to the highest note of its *ambitus* (range) on ' ter-' , the primary stress in this half of the melody. The high note of this phrase, as well of the high notes of most of the other musical phrases mentioned above, is indicated by a *virga,* which has vertical stem, rather than by a simple *punctum.* The *virga* is derived from the older semiology, where such a high note is represented simply by a vertical slash. And this in turn reflects the original chironomy, a vertical motion of the hand. These phrases provide a good example for the *crescendo-descrescendo* principle: the phrase rises relatively quickly; the top *virga* receives a slight emphasis, too subtle to be quantified; having "made its point", the phrase now eases down to a lower note.

3. The melody now drifts, with various excursions, from its highest note down to the tonic. Notice again the melisma on ' cen-' , the least stressed syllable in the concluding word. Keeping in mind the *decrescendo* in conclusion of the melody, care must be taken not to "thump" on the final note (nor on the concluding notes of cadences in general).

The structural characteristics observed in §§ 2 and 3 are typical of plainsing melodies: a rise to the uppermost note, and then a slower drift down to the final. (Obviously, this will be more evident in the authentic than in the plagal modes.) Consider as well the frequent melodic meditations on the unstressed syllables as well as the apparent dramatization of the stressed. Even then, examination of the *melismata* on the stressed syllables as well reveals a subtlety of structure which is not merely melodramatic.

"O GOD, we have heard with our ears, and our elders have told us :
the works you did in their days, and in the old time." – *Psalm* 44:1

Plainsong, not Performance

Notes toward restoring use of Gregorian Chant in your parish.

by David G. Jensen

The following ideas are not original with the writer, whose intention is to share what was given. The terms "plainsong'"
and "Gregorian Chant" are used here interchangeably, although the former does comprise a number of related traditions.

This essay is not an instruction manual on Gregorian Chant. There are a number of such works available, both old and new.
A fair amount of the theoretical jargon employed in these works is cited here, in order to provide definitions and context.
Some familiarity with Chant and the Liturgy is presupposed in many, not all, of the following paragraphs. [*see* §31]
What is presented here is another method of interpretation which is easier, is functional rather than theoretical, and
is equally consistent with the manuscript record. Strict purists may object to some parts of this essay. It is presented
as an anodyne for the constraints of 19th and 20th-century scientism. While objectivity is attempted throughout,
the writer's observations and opinions are stated as well.

"Back to the Future." – dir. Robert Zemeckis (1985)

01 Roman Chant is, and always has been, the prayer music of the Roman Catholic Church. Its roots extend back to the
Apostles, and to the Hebrew Temple before them. It is called Gregorian after Pope St. Gregory I, the Great (*c.* 540-604),
who did not compose the Chant, but compiled an anthology of the chants in use for centuries before him. Plainchant belongs
to the Catholic people. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) did nothing to impede its use, but rather commanded that
it continue as the liturgical norm, and that the congregations be encouraged to sing the parts,proper to them. In doing so,
the Council was affirmng the constant teaching of the Church until that time (including St. Pius X in *Tra le Sollicetudine*
(1903), and which has continued since (2007, USCCB – *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*).

02 Moreover, although Latin is often identified with the older rite, neither did the Council restrict the use of that language
in the proposed reforms (which became the *Novus Ordo,* not fully anticipated by the Council), and nowhere did it forbid
celebration of the traditional (Tridentine) Mass, now called the "Extraordinary Form". The right of the faithful, clergy
and congregations, to celebrate or assist at the traditional Mass (1962 usage) was restored by Pope Benedict XVI
in 2007 (*Summórum Pontificum*).

"In the Presence of the Past." – Rupert Sheldrake

03 As mentioned in §01, it was a mandate of the Second Vatican Council that use of Gregorian Chant not only be permitted,
but in fact encouraged and faciliated (*Sacrosanctum Concilium,* §§ 116, 117). Original research by Dom Eugène Cardine
OSB (1905–1988) regarding the interpretation of early Chant notation was published in 1968. Dom Cardine built
on the work of Dom André Mocquereau (1849-1930), who assembled a collection of the earliest manuscripts, called
the *Paléographie Musicale* (paleography is the study of ancient writing). Some sources of the manuscripts included
in the *Paléographie* and cited in the *Graduále Triplex* (§29) had been preserved in Benedictine Abbeys at Laôn (France)
and at St-Gall and Einsiedeln (both in Switzerland). Dom Mocquereau in turn differed from his teacher, Dom Joseph Pothier
OSB (1835-1923), in certain matters including rhythm and duration. The Vatican Edition of the *Gradual* (1908 – note
its proximity to *Tra le Sollicetudine* §07), which lacks any diacritical markings, is based on Dom Pothier's work.

04 Dom Pothier, Dom Mocquereau and Dom Cardine were professed members of the Benedictine Abbey *St-Pierre
de Solesmes* in Normandy (France), founded in 1837 by Dom Prosper Guéranger (1806-1875), who aspired to restore
Benedictine (founder St. Benedict of Nursia, *c.* 480-543 or 547) life and traditions, including plainsong. As the 19th century
progressed, Solesmes became a center of Chant scholarship, and for over a century since has published the authorized
versions of the chant books used in the Roman Catholic Liturgy, in particular the *Graduále Románum,* which contains
the necessary chants for the Sacred Liturgy.
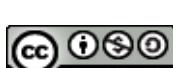
05 The practice of Gregorian Chant in Europe prior to the events described above had become highly eclectic, influenced by indigenous folk traditions, and with an overlay of later developments in art music. The task of Solesmes was to restore, so far as available evidence permitted, the original practice of Chant at the time of its codification by Pope St. Gregory the Great (§01). Intensive study was made of the *Paléographie* (§03). Various diacritical marks were devised by the monks to indicate accent, duration, etc., which were protected by copyright in their editions. Their musical punctuation continues to be generally accepted, although recent research suggests that certain instances may be obsolete. Particular attention was given to the recurrence of *neumes* (also spelled "neums")*,* distinctive groups of two or three notes on a single syllable. Dom Mocquereau's research culminated in the development of the Solesmes Method, a didactic system for teaching and conducting Gregorian Chant. This method was popularized in books by, among others, Dom Gregory Suñol OSB of Montserrat (1879-1946) and Justine Ward (American, 1879-1975), which books were widely used before Vatican II.

06 While acknowledging the presence of neumes (§05), the Solesmes Method sought to establish a more general theory of rhythm by dividing the entire melody into consecutive groups of two or three notes (not the same as the neumes), which are silently counted in conducting. This process was assisted by the additon of diacritical marks, in particular the *ictus* (sometimes called *vertical episema*). Found in older editions, but discontinued since 1980*,* it is a small vertical line placed below some of the initial notes of the rhythmíc groups mentioned above. This method had definite advantages. It required no proficiency in Latin. Above all, it achieved a uniform result, pleasing to the ear, and all the more so because it was thought to approximate early performance practice. Since the promulgation of *Summórum Pontíficum* (§02)*,* the Solesmes Method is being recovered and again promoted as the universal standard. The restoration (albeit optional, not obligatory) of the Tridentine Mass is a momentous event in the modern history of the Catholic Church. Uncritical use of the Solesmes Method, however, ignores certain of its limitations as well as subsequent developments in the decipherment of early Chant notation.

A language understood by the people.

07 Evident among the early discoveries at Solesmes was the intimate relation of text to melody in the original notation. This principle was extolled by St. Pius X in the motu proprio *Tra le Sollecitudine,* and further discussed by St. John Paul II in his chirograph on the centenary (2003) of that document. Both documents amply repay detailed study. Despite this insight, the method promulgated by Solesmes tends to obscure the dynamic relation between text and melody, and in fact subordinates the text to the melody. This is by no means to suggest melodramatic expression of the words in rendition of a chant, but rather that the pattern of accents in the text should be respected alongside that of the melody. The question then is: what is their proper relation? [*see* §23]

NOTE:: admittedly, the plainsong melodies on occasion indulge in "word-painting"; also, the psalm texts themselves are a bit graphic at times. Either is all the more reason to avoid affectation (*cf.* §20).

08 Equipped with recent anthropological data, and building on Dom Mocquereau's work, Dom Cardine further demonstrated the degree to which, at least in the older settings, the melody is modeled with varying degrees of detail around each syllable. It might be added that the most fully developed melodies are around the texts o f the proper antiphons, which are mostly derived, by direct citation or paraphrase, from Sacred Scripture (*cf.* §24). The neumes are a set of figures or *motifs* which recur throughout the melodic "narratives", a characteristic shared with other oral traditions, and which likely have mnemonic value.

09 Religious and literary texts were routinely chanted rather than read aloud throughout the ancient world. Gregorian Chant is distinguished by having unique melodies identified with each non-metrical (commatic) text. The melody in fact explicates rather than adorns the text, in a spiritual language distinct from Latin, and with the advantage that it is univerally understood. It is a patristic *dictum* that the Chant itself is prayer. (*Qui bene cantat, bis orat,* "Who sings, prays twice" – St Augustine). For centuries prior to graphic notation, the chants were preserved and conducted *via* chironomy (also spelled 'cheironomy'), or distinctive hand motions representing notes and groups of notes. It is analogous to the sign language used today as a manual dialect. The relative pitches were preserved in the oral tradition.

10 This practice (chironomy) was also employed in various traditions throughout the ancient Near East and beyond. It is depicted on painted wall reliefs in some Egyptian tombs. Chironomy continues to be practiced in some traditional cultures of the Middle East. The modern Kodály method of instruction employs the same principle. The earliest graphic Chant notation in fact consisted of drawings of these hand motions, placed above and around the syllables with which the notes were associated. Lines were later added one-by-one to distinguish acoustic intervals. The eventual result was modern common-practice musical notation, of which plainsong notation (square notes on a four-line staff) preserves an intermediate stage of development.

§10 NOTE: the term "chironomy"' was used, and and is so used now, by proponents of the Solesmes method, with reference to the hand motions used to conduct Chant from the fully developed (square) graphic notation. This use is to be distinguished from Dom Cardine's application of the term to semiology (§15).

"Flashback." – dir. Franco Amurri (1990)

11 A pivotal role in the continuous history of Gregorian Chant was played in the Frankish Empire, also called Carolingian, by its foremost ruler Charlemagne (742-814, crowned Roman Emperor in the year 800). The region, which included (but was not limited to) present-day France, Germany and Switzerland, experienced a surge of intellectual and cultural activity during this period. To establish liturgical conformity, use of the (then) unfamiliar Gregorian Missal, along with the often unknown chants, was encouraged over local usages. Cantors were brought from Rome for this purpose. The earliest efforts at graphic recording of chironomy (by drawing images of the manual gestures) date from this time; the earliest written evidence for neumatic notation appears in Metz (France) around the year 800. There is some question of how much modification or even composition of Chant took place during this period.

12 It is known that improvisation was widely practiced at the time. The manuscript *Cantatorium* (no. 359 in the monastic library at St. Gall, Switzerland) is the earliest (922-926) known complete manuscript to record semiology (*rf.* §10), and is among the best records of this elaboration. Consensus is that the original chants were transmitted fairly intact through this period, and their original form can be deduced through comparison of the various manuscripts. As might be expected, regional variants also appear in the manuscripts. As time passed, *tropes,* or words and phrases inserted into the texts, and which also required additonal music, began to be added, but were later proscribed by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The added notes, however, were often retained, lengthening greatly the melismata in various pieces. The earlier presence of tropes is attested in the names given to certain settings of the Ordinary; for example: *Kyrie Fons Bonitátis* indicates the presence at one time of the trope *fons bonitátis,* which is reflected as well in the unusually long melismata.

Never too much of a good thing.

13 Predictably, the composition of chants has continued from its formative years to the present day. Various performance styles have flourished, and have been forgotten. During the Middles Ages, taste came to prefer regular, often syncopated, rhythms with various, fixed note duration. This style, called *mensural* (measured), grew quickly in the later 13th century and acquired a more specific notation (different time values), which also enabled the transcription and composition of polyphony. A number of tunes from this and other periods were borrowed by the later monastic editors at Solesmes for their compilations; the melodies, however, were "Solesmized", *i.e.,* all signs indicating stress and duration were removed. As these melodies are mostly periodic, they were used for hymns and other metrical texts.

14 The fundamental unit of notation employed by Solesmes is the *punctum,* a square note equivalent to one syllable, and this is the manner in which the post-Gregorian melodies appear in their books. The original form of these melodies can only be guessed at from the original date of composition, which often is indicated. Modern (from late 19th c.) practice tends to superpose new texts on older melodies, which is not unprecedented, as several earlier variant (same melody adapted to different texts) sets can be found in in various editions of the *Graduále.* This is not to overlook recent attempts, with varying degrees of success. at original composition of chants, an effort which this writer acknowledges as laudable, so long as the structural depth of earlier compositions is appreciated and has been assimilated, at least intuitively. When the melody is not sufficiently integrated with the text, the result smacks of artifice.

"For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." – *II Corinthians* 3:6

15 The study of the inchoate graphic notation described in §10 is called *semiology,* or study of signs. One might think that it preserves the original melodies only in an inscrutable or rudimentary form. Dom Cardine's studies demonstrate much the opposite. The older notation, which is fairly consistent in the various manuscripts, reveals subtle and marvelous nuances of accent and duration, and even, according to some, variations in the pitch (microtones) of certain notes. The occasional presence of flats among the semitones is agreed by most interpreters, but their exact placement remains a matter of debate. Singing from this archaic notation requires intensive study by the director, as well as similar training of the members of a schola. Strict discipline and attention are required for successful rendition. Several contemporary ensembles continue to sing from Dom Cardine's interpretation of the chironomic notaton. The spiritual validity and depth of this ancient tradition is better realized from experience than in objective study.

Lex orandi, lex credendi.

16 Various researchers have promoted theories more radical than those of Dom Cardine, often involving the variables mentioned above, and each is asserted to be sound scholarship based on original research. Some of these theories may well be true. That is not the point. A musician older and wiser than this writer once remarked that the musical definition of "correct" changes over time, and that each successive definition is held with equal conviction. The notion fashionable at present is "original performance practice", along with criteria for determining what that was. There is a principle involved in liturgical conformity, spiritual as well as political. Cherished customs do indeed serve to validate constantly held beliefs. Experimenting with novel theories may be interesting, permissible perhaps in a sacred concert (§21), but seldom during Mass, especially if the congregation is expected to participate (§01).

17 Predictably, initial attempts by monastic choirs, parish scholas and other groups to apply Dom Cardine's method often resulted in frustration and failure, due to its unfamiliarity and complexity. It is difficult enough to be a vocation in itself and, until well understood, can distract from the more general aspects of plainsong, and even from its purpose: worship. This writer thinks, though, that the difficulty often results from insufficient understanding, which can cause the semiology to be regarded only as a pedantic refinement of the familiar square-note notation. Once understood, though, the semiology reveals the depth concealed in the latter notation.

Lex cantandi, lex orandi.

18 On an academic level, application of linguistic methods to the the tonal structure of the melodies shows general yet astonishing analogies with the phonology of the texts, further illustrating the character of plainsong as a separate language. One contemporary issue is whether such a radical and demanding change in choral formation is warranted. Various study (§16) of Dom Cardine's work continues to be pursued by musicologists, but the question remains whether Dom Cardine's primary insight, the intimate relation, at times virtual identity, of melody and text,can be realized apart from the chironomic notation. The answer is yes, and in manner familiar enough to those accustomed to, or trained in, the old methods of Solesmes; and with the square notation, without direct recourse to the chironomic semiology.

> "I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.
> And I cannot say how long, for that is to place it in time."
>
> – T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

19 Before proceeding with the forementioned response, it may be appropriate to relate another element, one which concerns experience, also mentioned above, rather than analysis. Certain chants can at times induce an acute state, somehow both immanent and transcendent, not "triggered" by, but rather identified with, the antiphon. It is certainly not merely an aesthetic "high". Neither is it only subjective, as the writer has observed this occur among several singers at the same time, and has heard too the same phenomenon discussed among other singers. One might think this event more probable in the longer, more elaborate chants; to the contrary, it is "noted" more often in certain shorter chants, such as a Communion antiphon. Neither does it occur solely with the chironomic notation, but with the later square-note versions as well. And, like martyrdom, it cannot be sought, only accepted (although the experience is certainly less grueling).

Sanctimony. Not.

20 Recalling that Chant is indeed prayer, it is fitting to say that plainsong is not an art, it is a discipline. It is a spiritual good, and must be respected as such. It is not the perfection of "talent", but the object of hard work and dedication (right intention). It is not "performed", it is offered (self-oblation, not abasement). Yet, as suggested above, the participant receives, perceptibly or not, more than he or she is capable of giving. A common saying among Chant novices is: "We don't sing the Chant; it sings us." Thus the undertaking is to be approached not only with due respect, but as much so with happy anticipation. Emulation takes the fun out of singing. Right intention does not preclude enjoyment. Pious grandiosity, conspicuous humility *etc.* do.

NOTES: _____
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_____
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21 It is best that Gregorian Chant not be sung n a secular environment. Even a sacred concert is best done in an ecclesial setting. This is not simply a pious cliché. The late otolaryngologist Alfred A. Tomatis (1920-2001) conducted numerous neurological studies of the effects of music. In 1967 he demonstrated the specific and essential role of plainsong in maintaining the physical and mental as well as the spiritual health of contemplative religious (monks and nuns). His conclusion is perfectly logical: if the human person consists of soul as well as body, it makes sense that the capacities of the latter (including the central nervous system) should conform with the operations of the former. As is usual, the answer lies somewhere in the middle. "Detachment" is the operative term. The appropriate response when complimented by a member of the congregation is simply: "Thank you". Further discussion is best directed toward what was done, rather than who did it.

<p style="text-align:center">As I was saying…</p>

22 The question remains (*rf.* §18) of how to apply Dom Cardine's principle in more general terms. At this stage it may be useful to review the major factors. As mentioned, the traditional Solesmes method tends to subordinate the text to the melody. The smoothing of its accentual structure tends to obscure the sense of the text. Likewise, the counting system tends to dull the actual musical accents. And, yes, the Method does have the advantage of producing a uniform result. So does a music box. The Method tries to obviate the monotony with the rhythmic theory of *arsis* and *thesis* (ebb and flow), applied to musical phrases of progressive length. This complicates the matter (in this writer's opinion) by *imposing* a more general rhythmic structure rather than *explicating* the rhythms implicit in the text and melody, and thus making plainchant cumbersome to sing. The *crescendo-decrescendo* principle, although retained in the arsis-thesis theory, is better applied to the natural divisions within a given chant.

23 Recalling Cardine's insistence (§08) on the integral relation between song and text, the contest between their respective accents is not resolved in favor of either, but of both. While occasionally the notes are modified slightly to accommodate the phonology of the text (*e.g.,* liquescents), the predominant characteristic is that *both* accents function in a sort of counterpoint to each other. This was a major component in the earliest compositions of Gregorian Chant, and it remains the key to its proper rendition.

<p style="text-align:center">By the way.</p>

24 Possible corroboration for the venerable antiquity and sacred character of Gregorian Chant may be found in the work of the late Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura (1912-2000), author of *The Music of the Bible Revealed* (see Bibliography, below). Although out of print, both the English and French versions and other of her works may still be accessible pdf on-line. She presents an original interpretation of the *te'amim,* melodic or phrase markings found above and below the Hebrew letters of the Jewish Scriptures, as are the *niqqud* (vowel pointing). Some of her arrangements can still be found on recordings.

25 The present writer finds Haïk-Vantoura's work intriguing, with the following reservation about the purported age of the notation: the square alphabet with which the *te'amim* are associated was originally Aramaic, and is thought to have supplanted the Old (also called Paeleo-) Hebrew script around the 5th century BCE. Some Talmudic authors trace its adoption to Ezra the Scribe during the return from the Babylonian exile. A Paleo-Hebrew version of the *Pentateuch* survives among the Samaritans, now a vanishing sect in the modern state of Israel. This latter contains neither *te'amim* nor vowel pointing (*niqqud,* §24), the latter devised by the Masoretes (7th‑9th centuries CE) to preserve the traditional pronunciation.

26 Although now regarded as cantillation marks (*prosody,* the tonal recitation of texts), Haïk-Vantoura offers documentation that the *te'amim* were a well-developed musical notation, long forgotten. She further avers that they are graphic representations of an earlier chironomy. The prose chants she deciphers, as in plainsong, are complex through melodies. The psalm settings are somewhat more repetitive, but by no means can be reduced to formulas; each psalm is unique. Her interpretations of these are especially lovely, a quality she cites as evidence for her theor.y.

27 Some say the *te'amim* are an invention of the Masoretes. It is not implausible to suppose that the Masoretes devised these marks to represent ancient melodies preserved through manual chironomy, supplemented by oral tradition. Although Haïk--Vantoura's interpretation is purely hypothetical, certain of the marks themselves *and* her interpretation of them correspond directly to symbols found in Gregorian semiology and Dom Cardine's interpretation. Oddly enough, the earliest manuscript evidence for each tradition, although geographically distant (Syria, the *Aleppo Codex* and Switzerland, *Cantatorium,* §12), dates from the first half of the 10th century. Possible kinship is denied (at least publicly) by both Haïk-Vantoura's advocates and Gregorian semiologists. This writer can offer another observation on Haïk-Vantoura's behalf: Werner's *The Sacred Bridge* (*see* Bibliography) cites melodic material common to the Ashknazic and Sephardic traditions as possible pre-Diaspora survivals; certain transcriptions using Haïk-Vantoura's system do indeed corrrespond.

28 The reader who has followed this discursion and retains any interest in the subject may now face a quandary, if there is no parish nearby that uses Gregorian Chant or is interested in doing so. Properly stated, the question is not "Novus Ordo" *vs.* "Extraordinary Form" of the Sacred Liturgy. As mentioned in §02 , Vatican II at no time forbade the use of Latin or plainsong, but rather commanded the preservation and use of both (although authorizing more alternatives to each than had been the case). The Novus Ordo can be celebrated by any priest in Latin, English or some combination of the two. In compliance with the demands of the Council, the 1974 edition of the *Graduále Románum* was studiously prepared at Solesmes under the direction of Dom Eugène Cardine, and conforms with the new Calendar.

29 If the reader's interest extends to semiology (the original chironomic notation), the best resource is the *Graduále Triplex* (Solesmes, 1979), edited by Dom Cardine, and which displays the original notation from two different manuscript traditions (when available) parallel to the square-note version. The pastor and/or congregation may labor under continuing misrepresentations concerning the propriety, or even liceity, of Gregorian Chant. As has been mentioned (§01), the authoritative documents unanimously require use of Gregorian Chant, and provide specific terms for its implementation.

30 The *Graduále Románum* (1961 ed.), often referred to simply as the *Graduále* or the Gradual, is the only book absolutely necessary for cantor(s) or schola in celebration of the Extraordinary Form (1962 usage) of the Roman Mass. It contains the minor propers, *abbrev.*: IN Introit, GR Gradual, AL Alleluia, OF Offertory and CO Communion, as well as the *Kyriále.* The *Kyriále* contains various settings of the *Ordinary,* the invariable parts of Mass: *Kyrie, Gloria* (omitted during penitential seasons), *Credo* (sung on Sundays and holy days), *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei.* The primary and almost indispensable volume, however, is the *Liber Usuális* (1962 ed., or 1961, available pdf on-line), which contains not only the *Graduále* mentioned above, but the texts and settings of the Divine Office (monastic hours), and, of particular interest, comprehensive instructions and references, including a complete table of the psalm tones.

31 The full ritual of the Sacred Liturgy is contained in the *Missále Románum* (1962), often referred to as the Roman Missal, or simply the Missal. It is a remarkable privilege that these books, and the 1974 *Graduále* as well, are available in pdf form free for download from the Internet. The significance of this development should not be underestimated. This writer remembers the fierce competition for the out-of-print books during the the 1970s and 1980s, when they were routinely exchanged for hundreds of dollars (a lot more money then). The words and music, however, are hardly to be referred to as "lyrics" and "scores", as is done in certain sites.

"Each one heard the disciples speaking in his *or her* own language." – *Acts* 2:6

32 Although the chants can be transposed into any language with satisfactory effect, they are best sung in Latin. This is due not only to their historical association, but to the integral relation of melody and text, as related above (§§ 07 & 08). The adaptation is easier with the psalm tones, to which any text, commatic (prose) or metrical (poetic, although less satisfactorily), English or other, can be pointed (arranged) successfully. Latin is preferred for the reasons stated above, and not because of any putative incantatory power. Whatever the language used, it must be understood. This does not require fluency, but only a reliable translation. Most traditional Latin missals have these, It may be objected that an (the cliché usually includes "overly") literal translation obscures the meaning of the text. Nonsense. The English translation should be studied beforehand with reference to the Latin, in order to identify the corresponding words.

33 Better understanding animates the rendition of both text and music, an effect not lost on the congregation, either. This does not mean in the least that translations are to be preferred (*rf.* §16). Traditional Anglicans, however, can delight in both volumes of *The Plainchant Gradual,* Parts I-II and III-IV, edited by G. H. Palmer and Francis Burgess, and published by St. Mary's Press, Wantage, first in 1946, and a revision in 1965. Both are now available on-line free in pdf format. Neither, though, is authorized for Roman Catholic use. Authorized for the Anglican dispensation within the Catholic Church is an excellent and more recent adapatation by C. David Burt, *The Anglican Use Gradual* (2004, 2006: Partridge Hill Press, Mansfield, MA).

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34 The persuaded reader may also face the dilemma of being asked to undertake this project without external preparation, and to recruit and collaborate with sufficient singers to achieve the desired objective. It is preferable that members of a schola or choir be members of the congregation, although applications from non-members should also be considered. Church choirs are a traditional venue for serious amateur musicians. Too much prior musical training can actually be an obstacle in learning plainsong, as it may be thought already to have provided sufficient background. It does not. Once acknowledged, this need not breed resentment. A major part of the director's role is to instruct each member and collectively (it can be done at the same rehearsal) patiently and with conviction. If the director is learning at the same time, patience and collaboration will still enable success in the venture.

35 A schola in this writer's experience is best composed of four to six members, who may or may (preferably) not include the director. In the case of an absence, three can preserve the *ensemble* (unison) cultivated during rehearsal. More than six members are cumbersome to direct, as constant attention and visibility are necessary to follow the conductor's direction, and it is harder to keep the voices together (*cf.* §36). Eight or more members, however, may be required if the choir is also to sing part music (*rf.* §37). The combination of more than six voices can be quite satisfactory, although conducted perhaps with less *finesse.* On the other hand, the plainsong can be sung well by a cantor s*olo,* or even by two or three cantors, alone or separate from a larger choir, their unison maintained by careful listening rather than by external direction. Location of the choir or schola is discussed in §§ 36 & 37. Terms often archaic are introduced (§38) because they occur in the traditional literature, not because retention of these architectural features is prerequisite for the correct rendition of Gregorian Chant. These suggestions are options, not rules.

Gilding the lily.

36 Some may propose keyboard accompaniment to aid the choir (NO) or congregation (MAYBE). If a schola or choir is unable to sing the original settings *a capella,* it may be better that they use the psalm tone versions (§42) as long as necessary. The longer any group sings with accompaniment, the harder it becomes for them to do without it. Also, the use of an organ obviates the text-based interpretation promoted in this essay. Notwithstanding, accompaniment should be done when it is really necessary or in an emergency (*e.g.,* absences), but not as a "quick fix". There is no lack of precedent for organ accompaniment of plainsong. Scores, both old and new, are readily available. Several generations ago, extemporary plainsong accompaniment and subsequent improvisation on the melodies were among the skills expected of an organist in many Catholic churches. The noted composer Olivier Messaien (1898-1992) shared this background. Organ guidance of the congregation is less of an issue; if the schola is not very strong, the organ can help the congregation to sing together.

"Let all things be done for edification." – *1 Corinthians* 14:26

37 This is not to say that competent arrangements, usually polyvocal, should not be used. On the contrary, such arrangements constitute a major part of the West's vast musical heritage. While the Second Vatican Council decreed that Gregorian Chant be given "pride of place" (S*acrosanctum Concilium,* §116) in the Sacred Liturgy, in a preceding article (§114) it also declares: "The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care." This latter point, for the most part, is outside the scope of the present essay. It will simply be observed that much (albeit simpler) of the really gorgeous old polyphony is quite achievable by an amateur volunteer choir (*rf.* §§ 34 & 35)*,* who can obtain considerable enjoyment and satisfaction in doing so, sentiments shared by the congregation. In fact, the available repertory has inscreased considerably during the past fifty years. The standards observed before the Council are sometimes exaggerated in contemporary guides. The old manuals presented ideals, and did not reflect actual practice. It was a sliding scale. Choirs were constructed relative to the size and resources of the parish. The selection of music was governed by the same criteria within the limits set by the Church, and with respect for the tastes of the congregation. Psalm-tone graduals (*rf.* §42) were widely used as appropriate.

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38 The terms introduced in this paragraph, although archaic, may prove useful at times. The ground plan of traditional churches is cruciform, and faces east (towards Jerusalem). In the United States, a choir loft (*or* gallery), at the back of the church and facing the sanctuary, is found in many Catholic churches built before 1960. This is by far the most convenient location for a schola or choir. Historically, such a balcony is a recent development, esp. popular during the 18th century. Earlier European practice, especially in larger churches, placed the choir in the front part of the chancel, the area between the transept (the vacant area in front of the nave) and the sanctuary. A rood (crucifix or cross, often surmounting the) screen often stood in front of the chancel and facing the transept and nave, which is the central and large part of the church where the congregation sits. In some older churches the transept extends past the aisle on either side; these areas are called semitransepts, north and south if the church faces east. The schola or cantors can stand in the south (right) semitransept, but not too far back, or in the aisle if the area is not recessed. Pews are some sometimes found in the semitransepts; if not, temporary chairs can be used. If the transept is not recessed, the singers can sit in the front pew of the nave, so as not to obstruct the aisle. This floor plan, although incomplete, is basically a rectangle, and not so complex as it may sound. It may be helpful to examine a diagram, which is easily found on-line or elsewhere.

39 Some churches place the choir in the sanctuary. In more recent design, some churches now have congregational seating in a semi-circle, and the space (formerly transept and chancel) separating the sanctuary is removed. The contents of §38 are guidelines, not rules. Liturgically and logistically, a schola works with the space provided. The deciding factors for the choir are audibility, without being overbearing, and visibility, if unavoidable, not so prominent as to distract from the clergy at the altar. For example, seating of the choir in a chancel position in a smaller church would likely be a bit loud, literally as well as figuratively (*cf.* §20). If they are seated apart from the congregation, vesting of the singers (cassock and surplice) may be appropriate; if seated with or near the congregation, plain and tasteful lay attire might be preferable. The congregation should be encouraged to join in singing the Ordinary and the responses. This conforms with the documents, and it is tiring for the schola or cantors to sing the entire Liturgy (Ordinary and Propers) by themselves.

"There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." – *Galatians* 3:28

40 *De Musica Sacra* (1958), a musical instruction by Pope Ven.Pius XII, retained its authority in 1962, the usage of which year is set as the standard (§02) for the Extraordinary Form. §93.c of *De Musica Sacra* requires that a schola or choir be composed exclusively of males. §100 mitigates slightly to state that an entirely female or a mixed group is permitted, so long as the genders are kept separate. These provisions are cited only to propose a solution to a possible dilemma.

41 Choosing a starting pitch has not yet been discussed in this essay, but it is an essential factor in the successful rendition of Chant. The pitches, of course, in plainsong are entirely relative. Early on, determine the tonal range of the group which is to sing. A group's tonal comfort zone is discovered best by trial and error, using a pitchpipe. Useful as well is to tabulate the vocal range of each member of the group, so as to distinguish which members can "carry the tune" when it wanders beyond the group's limits, or to select cantors for the verse, etc. Falsetto, if convincing, is admissible only as necessary to achieve the highest notes, and is usually to be avoided. Generally speaking, if a singer errs tonally, is distracted, or is unsure of attaining the succeeding pitch(es), the best response is to stop singing until confident of rejoining the group, which is to be done discreetly. If *solo,* the cantor should stop for a moment, and resume in the same manner as before.

42 When preparing to sing, fit the piece as well as possible within the limits mentioned above, and place the opening pitch where it belongs within its gamut (range of notes). The director may want to make note of the starting pitches for future reference, with the understanding that they are subject to modulation according to which singers are present, the time of day, or the season of the year (humidity), etc. When the problems are few and simple, it may be preferable to employ any of the solutions suggested above. When an antiphon is beyond the groups capacity, however, whether due to its range or difficulty, etc., the traditional solution is to set the text to the psalm tone corresponding to the antiphon's mode (*see* §45; the verse, if present, uses the same tone).

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43 A similar problem can occur within a mixed group singing monophony, including Gregorian Chant, because of the different ranges characteristic of male and female voices. Mostly they can sing together comfortably an octave apart, but not always. The same problem may occur with widely divergent vocal ranges within either gender. There are several possible solutions. One is antiphonal (alternate high and low) singing, *e.g.* antiphon (low) and verses (high), or *vv.* Another solution is *organum,* different voices singing the same chant at parallel intervals, usually the central voice along with a fourth (usually below) and/or a fifth (above). Although it may be difficult at first, the skill can be acquired within a reasonable period of time. Only "…concords such as the octave, fifth and fourth, that enrich the melody and may be sung above the simple ecclesiastical chant." – Pope John XXII (1324, from Avignon).

<center>"Seven times a day do I praise you." – *Psalm* 119:164</center>

44 The psalm tones are eight+ chant formulae used primarily in the *Divine Office*, now often called the Liturgy of the Hours *(rf.* §30)*.* The term 'office' did not refer to a place of business, but is derived from the Latin word for "duty", *i.e.,* the obligation of the creature (created being) to render the praise due to its Creator. The old idiom "to tell an office" is otherwise easily misunderstood. Compline, the eighth and final office of the day, was added last to complete the (metaphorical) octave of the musical scale. Such ideas were derived from the Greek philosopher Pythagoras (6th century BCE), who, although his teachings survived only second-hand (esp. *via* Boethius),was taken seriously in those days.

45 Several of the psalm tones have been traced back to the Hebrew Temple (*rf.* §§ 01 & 26). Numerous variants of the intonations (opening *formulae*), and especially of the cadences (concluding *formulae*) developed in through the early Christian centuries. In the 19th century, the monks of Solesmes *(rf.* §04) standardized the intonations, and reduced the final cadences to sets of the best established for each tone. Their reference table of psalm tones (*rf.* §30) comprises a full set, including the *intonations, reciting tones, mediant* (middle) *cadences,* and the reduced numbers of the *final cadences.*

46 Many of the proper antiphons also have a verse, usually from a psalm. The antiphons themselves are often, although not always, drawn from Scripture. The psalm verse is sometimes the standard, at other times an elaborated version of the psalm tone associated with the mode of the antiphon. There is a slightly more elaborate set of psalm tones used for the *Gloria Patri* in the introits (entrance antiphons), and for the canticles in the offices mentioned in §44. It has been speculated that all the minor propers of the Mass originally were complete psalms with the antiphon as a sort of refrain, and were subsequently condensed to their present form.

47 The original Hebrew psalms are more rhythmic in composition than either their Latin or English translations. The term *parallelism* describes the manner in which the original psalms are composed, meaning the division of each verse (Gk. *stichus*, pl. *stichera*) into complementary halves. (*hemistich*s). From Temple days until now, the chanting of psalms is often *antiphonal* (not to be confused with *antiphon,* §30)*,* the respective halves sung back-and-forth between two choirs or groups, one sometimes the cantor(s) within the schola or choir. This is not call-and-response; rather, the second half paraphrases or complements the first half. When *pointing* (dividing and marking; *see* §32) a prose text for use with a psalm tone, care should be taken to respect this principle as much as possible, rather than arbitrarily chopping up the text to fit within a melodic formula.

48 The psalm tones are among the oldest forms of plainsong, and chanting of psalms is widely regarded as "basic training" for Gregorian Chant. It builds breath control, proper phrasing (*crescendo-decrescendo*), crisp articulation and other fundamental skills. Pursuant to §45, certain proper antiphons appear to have been composed on the "skeleton", or frame, of a psalm tone. Apparent evidence must be evaluated carefully, as such "quotes" may simply be melodic figures characteristic of the mode. Although relatively simple in structure, the psalm tones should not be regarded as simplistic, or inferior to the music of the antiphons. The cumulative effect on contemplative religious would then be *accidia,* or boredom, whereas the studies of Alfred Tomatis (§21) demonstrate the opposite.

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49 An acoustic strategy is always necessary. Buildings designed in imitation of older European churches share not only cultural affinity, but often preserve their acoustic advantages. Properly informed, both choir and clergy can be heard clearly in such buildings without amplication. The vaulted ceilings in Medieval Gothic churches and chapels were designed for a similar purpose. They "collect" the overtones, and "send them back" alongside the melody, sometimes with remarkable effect. Some say, not implausibly, that vocal imimitation of these resonant frequencies was the origin of western polyphony. The acoustic phenomenon of the *harmonic series* (sequence of additional notes generated within the resonance) is beyond the scope of the present essay, but merits further investigation. Indeed, Pythagorean (*rf.* §44) harmonic ratios were often factored into certain structural proportions within these buildings.

50 Amplification, though, is usally present, and can complicate rather than simplify the issue in said older buildings when it is not done in accord with the existing acoustic structure. Amplification is almost universal in newer buildings, which are often otherwise an acoustic vacuum. When amplification is present, sing toward the congregation and hope that the speakers are well placed. Make sure the microphone(s) are at the correct angle and at the proper distance from the singers, and are set at the right volume. When amplication can be avoided, the key element is resonance (reverberation). Sing at an angle about as far as the middle of the congregation but no farther back, and towards a smooth, hard surface, usually the opposing wall. This can be complicated when there are large windows on both walls. When possible, sing over their heads, never below, *i.e.,* into the congregation. Avoid any direct eye contact. Clutter and enclosed spaces should be bypassed, for they fragment or trap the sound. Carpet and acoustic tile should be sidestepped, for they absorb the sound. The best solution is usually discovered by experimentation, by thinking on one's feet, literally.

"The end is where we start from." – T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

51 The uninitiated reader may yet face the challenge (or opportunity) of pursuing the subject alone. Diligent study will culminate in edification, the fruit of which is inner peace rather than frustration. It is best not to rely too much on recordings. Their sound is usually highly engineered after the fact and sets an exaggerated standard, and it is static, so that the singer's concept becomes imitative. Recall that plainsong is a behavior, not a product. Direct experience of a plainsong Liturgy is desirable, but not essential. Although it may sound unusual, the present writer recommends private reading and study of the Gradual, rather as one would another book. Later in the evening can be a good time, when distractions have abated. It is an anthology, and so the "chapters" need not be read consecutively. Practice reading the texts until it becomes effortless. This will also increase comprehension, as the more important words do recur.

52 Then decipher the notes phrase by phrase, until that too becomes easier. Sing the melodies. *Solfège,* or sight-reading by the name of each note (using *do-re-mi* solmization), although initially difficult, is by far the most expedient method in both initial study and rehearsal. The first note can be determined from the clef (*do* or *fa*), and the final note will be that identified with the mode. Such study will discover rich and strange turns of melodic phrase. Further examination of the configurations of melody in relation to the text it parallels will further disclose what cannot be expressed apart from either. Internalization of the plainsong *corpus* by this or comparable means builds a sure foundation for singing and conducting Gregorian Chant.

EVERY CATHOLIC CHILD SHOULD KNOW CREDO I BY HEART BEFORE THE AGE OF 10 YEARS.

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A Select Bibliography

Hardly exhaustive, but these are good set for undertaking serious study of Gregorian Chant. Most of the books are older; bear in mind that they are products of a liturgical culture that almost ceased to exist for over a generation. They are among the few sources of instruction, and together provide necessary perspective for evaluating current opinions on the subject.

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How to Read Gregorian Chant

by David G. Jensen

01. The customary notation of Gregorian Chant preserves an intermediate state of development toward modern, common--practice musical notation. The development of musical notation in the West has much in common with the earlier history of written language. Paleography is the study of ancient writing, of both language and music. The history of writing is characterized by the gradual isolation and representation of the constituent sounds of language. Likewise, the history of musical notation consists of the gradual recognition and representation of the constituent notes within a tonal system. "Constituent" here means the set of sounds or notes which the listener recognizes as significant (*i.e.,* "belonging" to a specific language or musical scale. The following represents Gregorian notation as it was restored and refined by the Benedictine monks of the Abbey *St-Pierre de Solesmes* (France) in the 19th and 20th centuries, and which remains the standard for Roman Catholic liturgical use.

NOTATION
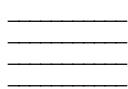
01a. staff	01b. quarter-bar	01c. half-bar	01d. full bar	01e. double bar	01f. apostrophe

01a. The Gregorian **staff** (*pl.* staves) has four lines (rather than the five customary in modern notation); they are counted (first, second etc.) from the lowest to the highest.
01b. The quarter-bar indicates a brief pause, without releasing the breath.
01c. The half-bar allows a brief stop; may "snatch" a breath before resuming at same tempo and volume.
01d The full bar allows a complete stop with a full breath, but with the expectation of resuming the chant.
01e. The double bar indicates a complete stop at the conclusion of a piece or a section of a piece; sometimes used with alternating (antiphonal) parts or responses.
01f. The apostrophe, usually placed about midway in a prolonged line of text, in some cases called a period (rhetorical term, not punctuation); allows for a brief pause; may "snatch" a breath before resuming at same tempo and volume.
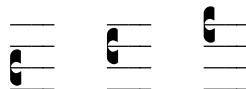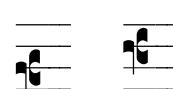
02a.	02b.	02c.	02d.	02e.

02. Just as the *pitch* (but not the intervals) of Gregorian Chant is purely relative, so the **clef** may occur in various places on the staff. The clef is located with respect to the range of the melody which follows. Gregorian chant uses the familiar (and Gregorian in origin) *do re mi* solmization (note names). The The relative pitch of all notes within a chant are reckoned in relation to the clef (*do* or *fa*).

02a, b, c. The *do* clef locates that interval on the staff. It may occur on the second, third or fourth lines (a, b or c). Notice that it is a stylized "C".

02d, e. The *fa* clef locates that interval on the staff. If may occur on the second or thirds lines (a or b). Notice that it is a stylized "F".

03. The successive notes within a scale, *i.e.* intervals distinguished by relative acoustic distance rather than absolute pitch, are called *degrees* of the scale; The names given to the sequence of degrees within a scale, regardless of mode, follow:

1st tonic; 2nd supertonic; 3rd mediant; 4th subdominant; 5th dominant; 6th submediant; 7th leading tone; 8th octave
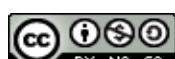
These terms are useful when referring to a scale in generic terms, rather than its particular solmization. The degrees are also called by their ordinal numbers, for example: "*la* is the fifth of the Dorian mode".

04. The **square notation** of Gregorian Chant may appear obscure or difficult, but that is only because it is unfamiliar; in fact, it is neither. Sometimes, with the intention to facilitate reading, it is transcribed into common-practice notation, in which the basic note, the *punctum,* is equated to an eighth note, and so on. In practice, this only makes singing more difficult, because it is not as well suited to the genre. Square notation is relatively easy to learn. Although it may be cumbersome at first, the best practice method is *solfège* (aka sol-fedge), to identify and sing the successive intervals (*viz.* do, re, mi etc.), or, more simply put, to practice singing the notes by their names. Once acquired, this technique makes sight-singing easier. Within a surprisingly short period of time, mental recognition of the intervals makes the arduous counting up and down from the clef unnecessary.

05. As suggested by the do-re-mi scale mentioned above, Gregorian Chant is diatonic. Although the presence of microtones has been proposed, they are not a defining part of plainsong tonality. The term "diatonic" indicates a scale composed of two intervals: the tone, also called a whole-step, and the semitone, also called a half-step, because it is one-half the acoustic distance of the former. The interval of a semitone is found between the degrees mi-fa and ti-do of the diatonic scale; the first of each pair is called a semitone. The remaining notes, which are five, are also called pentatones for that reason. The eight modes consist of permutations of the diatonic scale, and their differing character is due to the shifting positions of the semitones.

06. Attention may now be directed to the square notation mentioned above. First, it must be emphasized the this notation is not mensural, and, unlike modern common-practice, the notes do not have fixed duration. It is a common and disastrous error, that once the punctum is equated with a single beat, a dot (also called a *mora*) **.** following a punctum is thought simply to double its value to exactly two beats, and the episema **–** _ (above or below the note) merely to add precisely half again to a note's temporal value. The temporal value of these signs, dot and episema, is relative exclusively to that of the note that either accompanies, and is variable according to context, the sense of the text, the time of day, the mood of the choir director, etc.

07. The rhythm of plainsong (Gregorian Chant) is that of speech, and not that of a clock. The approximate value of a punctum is a single syllable, rather than the *precise* value of an eighth-note. The rendition of plainsong resembles tonal reading aloud, which, in a fairly proximate sense, it is. The rhythm of plainsong may be likened to a continuum in which certain figures or *motifs* (neums, also spelled neume) recur, and which contains occasional tonal excursions (melismáta), or meditations, on a word or syllable.

Visually scan about three notes ahead of what you are singing, in order to maintain continuity. Even if you know a chant by heart, sing from the written score. The memory can be wrong. Also, it helps all the singers to to achieve *ensemble* (unison, the 'continuum' mentioned above) in following the conductor. The most important factor in this regard is that the singers listen to each other, as well as to themselves, while watching the conductor just over the top (not to the side) of the written score. Ideally, it should be difficult to distinguish among the voices.
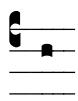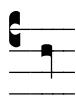

07a. punctum   07b. virga   07c. rhombus   07d. flat/natural   07e. custos
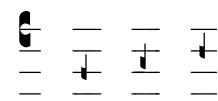
07a. A *p**unctum** generally represents the length of one syllable; as mentioned, its duration
    is relative rather than absolute. The note is also called a ***punctum quadrátum***.
07b. the Latin term **virga** means 'rod'; it is generally the uppermost note
    of a phrase or group of notes. It is slightly lengthened, too subtly to quantify.
07c. The **rhombus** occurs in descending phrases; hasten slightly,
    but do not "rush". The note is also called a *punctum inclinátum.*
07d. As in standard notation, the flat (a stylized "B") lowers a semitone (usually *ti*) by one half-step; it generally
    is retained through the balance of the phrase, musical (see §§ 02 – 04, above) or verbal. A natural raises
    the previously flatted note to its natural "state".
07e. The **custos** (pl. *custodes,* Latin 'guardian') is not an actual note, but is found at the end of a staff to indicate
    the first ("pickup") note in the following staff.

NEUMS

08. As mentioned on the second page, Gregorian Chant is characterized by a set of figures or *motifs,* called "neums" (often spelled "neume"), which recur throughout. A simple (*vs.* compound) neum is composed of two or three notes. Basic notation is introduced in §07 above; following are the neums most frequently encountered, with comments:
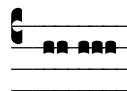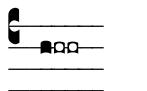
09a. apostropha   09b. distropha   09c. tristropha   09d. strophicus   09e. divirga   09f. trivirga

09a. Identical to a *punctum,* the note is called an **apostropha** (not the same as *apostrophe,* 01f)
    when it is the first of an identical series.
09b. The **distropha** is a set of two consecutive puncta on the same pitch.
09c. The **tristropha** is a series of three consecutive puncta on the same pitch.
09d. The **strophicus** consists of one distropha and one tristropha. It is sung as its appearance suggests.

NOTE: *puncta* is the plural of *punctum. Distropha* and *tristropha* are both singular; their plural ends in *-ae.*

09. Longer series of identical notes occur on occasion in the Gradual, but these are usually subdivided into groups of two and three notes (*distrophae* =Eng. distrophes and *tristrophae* = Eng. tristrophes). *Repercussion* denotes the manner in which members of these groups are distinguished. This is theoretically done by a subtle pulse of the larynx, but is difficult to realize in practice. Above all, *aspiration* (the 'h' sound, = ha-ha-ha-ha) is to be avoided. The safest course is usually to hold the same note for a count of two or three. When there is a series of distrophes and tristrophes, as mentioned above, it is sufficient to "suggest" the very slightest pause between each of them.

09e. The **divirga** is a set of two consecutive, identical virgae.
09f. The **trivirga** is a series of three consecutive, identical virgae.

More so than those of the distropha or trisropha, the notes in both of these are
*repercussed* (technically, the term should be *repercuted,* but 'repercuss' is customary).

10. Observe that the precise intervals in the following are variable, and
that it is the relative position of the component notes which defines the neum.
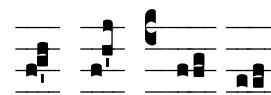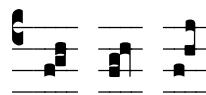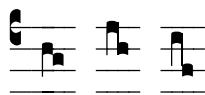
    10a. podátus (pes)   09b. clivis   09c. quilisma   09d. scandicus   09e. salicus

10a. When two notes are vertically parallel (as in **podátus**, above), the lower note is sung first.
10b. In a **clivis**, the higher note (usually a *virga*) is sung first, and it is placed to the left of the following, lower note.
10c. The middle, jaggèd note is called a **quilisma**. The preceding note is doubled, and the quilisma is sung as
    a passing tone to the uppermost note. The quilisma is usually, but not always, a semitone, most often *ti.*
    Its shape suggests that it was originally an ornament, such as a sort of trill.
10d. The **scandicus** consists of three ascending notes (sung 1-2-3); the precise intervals may vary.
10e. The **salicus** is similar to the scandicus, except that it consists of one + two notes (sung 1-1-2).
   The distinction is too subtle to quantify. Simply counting mentally, as suggested, should suffice.

NOTES _____

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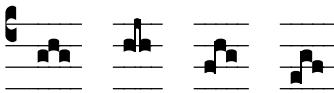
11a. climácus   11b. torculus   11c. porrectus

11a. A **climácus** consists of three descending notes; cf. 09d. *Scandicus* (above). The top note
   (a *virga*) receives slight emphasis, but the descending notes which follow should not be "rushed".
11b. A **torculus** consists of three notes, the second of which is higher than the other two.
11c. The **porrectus** uses a distinctive notation, but is simply the inversion of a *torculus:*
   three notes, the second of which is lower than the other two.

12. Certain neums may be conjoined to form a *compound neum,* but precise identification is not necessary for the successful rendition of a chant. The basic neums are described here to facilitate sight-reading through identification of recurrent melodic figures, and to provide a basis for more advanced study of the subject. The example shown below does require explanation:

12a. pressus   *vs.*   12b. apposed   12c. trigon
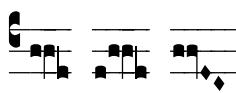
12a. The **pressus** arises when the last note of a neum or group of notes is the same as the first note of the succeeding group,
   and both notes are on the same syllable. The two notes are sung continuously but not with equal weight. The first note
   may be said to "press" (not merely c*rescendo*) into the second, but without obscuring the first.

12b. The *pressus* is characterized by a *punctum* followed by a v*irga*; when two *virgae* are conjoined,
   they do not form a *pressus,* but are said to be in **apposition**, and so are lightly repercussed (*cf.* §08e & f).

12c. The **trigon** is a bit obscure. Its form can resemble a *torculus,* but its exact interpretation is disputed.
   The *trigon* may contain a nuance of interval (microtone). It is included here mainly for reference.

LIQUESCENTS

13a. epiphonus (pes)   13b. cephalicus (clivis)   13c. ancus (Climácus)   13d. liq. Torculus   13e. liq. porrectus

13. Liquescents are used when adjoining vowels tend to merge into a diphthong, or with certain neighboring consonants.
   The distinctive notation denotes some *rapport* between neighboring sounds in the text, which are still clearly enunciated.

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ADDED NOTES

14. An **oriscus** is a (square) *punctum quadrátum* placed at the end of a neum. In older editions it has a distinctive form (14d).

| 14a. | 14b. | 14c | 14d. |

15. **flexus**: descending note added to ascending group (a podátus flexus is another name for torculus)

15a. porrectus flexus   15b. scandicus flexus   15c. salicus flexus

16. **resupínus** : ascending note added to descending group

17. **subpunctis**: two descending notes added to an ascending group

16a. climácus resupínus   16b. torculus resupínus   17a. pes subpunctis   17b. scandicus subpunctis

18. The **scandicus** and **climácus** may be extended by notes in the same direction, without any change of name.

18a. scandicus   18b. climácus

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Gregorian Modes

by David G. Jensen

The **final** (tonic) is indicated in boldface, and its note is <u>underlined</u>.
The *dominant* (reciting tone) is indicated in italics, and its note is hollow.

AUTHENTIC   PLAGAL

PROTUS (final *Re*)

I Dorian
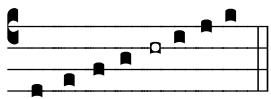
II Hypodorian
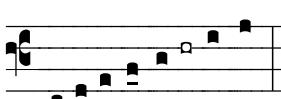
**re** mi fa sol *la* ti do re   la ti do **re** mi *fa* sol la

DEUTERUS (final *Mi*)

III Phrygian
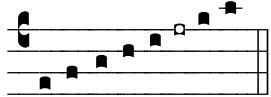
IV Hypophrygian

mi fa sol la ti *do* re mi   ti do re **mi** fa sol *la* ti
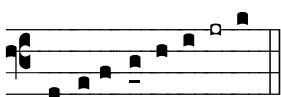
TRITUS (final *Fa*)

V Lydian

VI Hypolydian

fa sol la ti *do* re mi fa   do re mi **fa** sol *la* ti do

TETRARDUS (final *Sol)*

VII Mixolydian

VIII Hypomixolydian
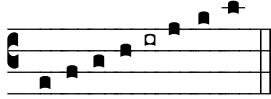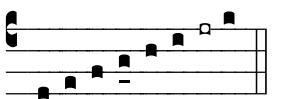
sol la ti do *re* mi fa sol   re mi fa **sol** la ti *do* re

Ut Queant Laxis (stanza 1)

(Vesper hymn for the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, June 24)

   <u>Ut</u> queant laxis, <u>reso</u>náre fibris   <u>Mi</u>-ra gestórum, <u>fá</u>muli tuórum,   <u>Sol</u>ve pollúti,   <u>lá</u>bii reátum, Sancte <u>Io</u>ánnes.
The text is ascribed to Paul the Deacon (730-799). In the plainsong melody, the underlined syllables fall on the first six notes of our scale (hexachord). These syllables were chosen by Guido of Arezzo (990-1050) to name the notes. Several names were later changed: *ut* became 'do' (probably from <u>*Domi*</u>*nus*), and *si* (from *Sancte <u>Io</u>annes*) became 'ti', so that each note would begin with a hard consonant. Guido also developed the system of Gregorian modes.
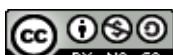
How to Sing Gregorian Chant

by David G. Jensen

The following describes how to sing plainsong (*cantus planus:* here, Gregorian Chant); "a way" might be more appropriate than "how", as, historically speaking, there is no single "correct" method.. Described here are the conventions of monastic Chant, codified over a century ago by the monks of Solesmes (France). Included are some practical suggestions from this author's experience. It will be "noted" that these directions are similar to those for public speaking, to which the Chant bears a close relation, indeed closer than to the "art" song of succeeding centuries. (There is a spiritual point here, which is left to the reader to consider.)

POSTURE

Stand up straight, but do not lean back. The proverbial "book on the head" is a convenient way to determine this. Leaning the head back constricts the wind pipe. The eyes should look right ahead, at a 90º angle from the body. Straighten the shoulders; this is best done by pushing them down and only slightly back. Do not expand the chest.

Do not contract the abdomen. Rather, relax, without slouching. Also relax the base of the spine and keep it stable, but not stationary.

In sum, obtain an alert, dignified bearing, without restraining any of the muscles involved in singing.
These muscles are distributed throughout the entire body. Hold the music with both hands, about midway between
the abdomen and the eyes, high enough and at an angle not to require the head to incline, but low enough not to block the voice. This allows the singer to look at the music when necessary, without changing the position of the head.

BREATHING

This is the most important point, in Chant, and singing
in general. Breathe from the abdomen, not from the chest. Control the release of air from the abdomen. A small, quick breath is permissible at pauses in the text, and a full breath should be taken only at a full stop (in a psalm tone, at the mediation; see below). Do not "gulp" for breath. If running out of breath while singing *ensemble* (with a group), pause for a moment to take a breath, and resume singing discreetly. If singing *solo,* pause briefly before running out of breath, and resume at the same pace and timbre. The operative factor here is continuity.

SINGING

Open the mouth; otherwise the sound cannot escape. Open the back of the throat wide enough to expose the nasal passage. This not only facilitates the flow of air, but opens the sinuses, thus producing a fuller and more resonant sound. Sing from the throat rather than the palate. *Vibrato* is to be avoided when possible, or at least not cultivated. Above all, an operatic or "crooning" style is not to be done; with regard to chant, both are contrary to religion. Face straight ahead (see POSTURE, above). Sing at a moderate volume, just loud enough to be clearly audible throughout the church; when singing *ensemble,* no single voice should be conspicuous over the others.

Whatever a singer hears internally, if not "properly" articulated and projected, will not be audible to the congregation. NOTE: this manner of singing usually does not require electrical amplification. If a microphone is used, these guidelines can be modified to achieve a similar effect.

ARTICULATION

Be very sure that the singers all agree in pronunciation.

Pronounce the consonants distinctly. Release (the tongue or lips) final consonants before proceeding to the next word. Especially, do not "swallow" consonants at the end of a verse. Pronounce double consonants separately, but without inserting a stop (the "uh" sound) between them.

Pronounce the vowels clearly and crisply, without slurring. When a word ends in a vowel and the following word begins with the same or a similar vowel, the two vowels may be *elided* (n. *elision* – merged into a single syllable). Elision may or may not be indicated by the symbol ‿ between the two vowels. There is no single rule governing the practice.

RHYTHM AND PHRASING

Generally speaking, the rhythm of plainsong is that of speech, of which it can be considered a particular type.
The text is not superposed on a preëxisting melody, nor *vice-versa*; rather, they are both parts of the same thing. Sing at a moderate and consistent pace. Avoid "expression" as well as monotony, the latter including the rapid "singsong" stereotype of this music. Phrasing, including pauses and stops should be done discreetly, and reflect the divisions of the text. Excessive modulation of the voice is to be avoided, for example, in commands and questions *etc.* Subtle inflection is sufficient.

The basic rule of phrasing is *crescendo < > decrescendo,* applied first to the chant as a whole: gradual increase in pace and volume at the beginning, and gradual decrease
in both towards the end. The method can be visualized
as a bell curve. The same manner applies in turn to each section, to each phrase with a section, to each word within a phrase, and finally to each syllable within a word.

Of course, the above is almost impossible to achieve in detail, and on occasion does not fit the text (*decrescendo*
on a final accent is a challenge, but it can be done). With practice the general principle becomes habit, which is the intention of the rule. This obviates the careless, declamatory style which can occur otherwise.

CONCLUSION

Conscientiously applied, these directions become habitual, enabling focus on what is done, rather than technique; thus "performance" becomes more an act of prayer. Patience is counseled, as it can take some time to acquire the breath control recommended above.

VERSION 1.0 OF THIS DOCUMENT

How to Chant the Psalms

by David G. Jensen

There are eight regular *Psalm Tones* (formulas for chanting psalms), indicated by the Roman numerals I through VIII., each of which corresponds to theGregorian *mode* having the same number; as the concluding note *(final)* of each pair is on the same degree of the scale (*re, mi, fa* or *sol*).. Five of the eight Tones have more than one possible ending (also called *cadence*), the choice of which is indicated by a letter of the alphabet. Three additional Tones, the Peregrine, the Direct and the third simply styled "Irregular," are included, as they are also employed on occasion in the Sacred Liturgy.

STRUCTURE

Each line *(verse)* is composed of two halves, or *hemistichs.* This feature, called *parallelism,* is characteristic of Hebrew poetry in general. The *mediation* (marked *) is the brief pause in the middle of each verse. The opening syllables of each Tone are called its *intonation*, and are italicized. The accented notes in the mediation and ending correspond with the accented syllable (marked in **boldface**) in the respective section of the text, The middle of each hemistich is sung on a single pitch, called the *tenor* or *reciting tone,* indicated by hollow notes, which are also used for additional unaccented syllables in the mediation and ending, as well as the occasional *flex.* The *preparatory syllables* before the mediation and ending of each tone are also italicized.

When the first half of a verse is short, the intonation may be omitted. Conversely, when the first half of a verse is too long to be recited comfortably, it may divided, and an unaccented syllable(s) may be dropped a note or two. The preceding accent is indicated in **boldface,** and the lowered syllable, called a *flex,* is followed by a dagger (†). A pause other than a flex (after an accented syllable in the first half, or anywhere in the second) may be indicated by a vertical line │ .

PHRASING

A musical phrase in the chanting of psalms may be understood on three levels: each verse as whole, each hemistich (half), and each group of words within a hemistich. A phrase is begun softly and slowly, increases in speed and volume to the middle of the phrase, and both progressively decrease to its end. Theis may be visualized as a bell curve. The principle applies to each verse as a whole, and proportionately to each subordinate section of the text it contains.

The Mediation is observed with a full stop, without losing the momentum of the Reciting Note. By tradition, the length of this pause is that of the words *Pater noster.* In Tones II and VIII, the Accent may be placed on a final monosyllable *(abrupt mediation),* and the remaining notes omitted; it is also used with a two-syllable word in which the second syllable is stressed.

Contrary to what one might expect, a similar pause is not observed at the conclusion of a verse, and the following verse proceeds directly after a full stop. Care must be taken neither to "swallow" the final syllable nor to give it undue emphasis.

RHYTHM

An animating principle of Plainsong is that its rhythm is that of the text. In fact, it is better considered as a function of the text, rather than an addition to. The relative length and emphasis of the syllables is that of speech. Three levels of stress can be distinguished: primary, secondary and unstressed, e.g., *sécondàry*. A secondary verbal Stress in the Mediation or Conclusion of a chant must not dominate a primary Stress which precedes it. Preference in the Pointing is given to a primary Stress, even when it is followed by a secondary, unless that would protract the remainder of the phrase. Again, speech is the best guide.

Likewise, while the musical accent must not eclipse the verbal, neither does the verbal accent obscure it. The two operate in a sort counterpoint; with practice, this characteristic can be developed to good effect.

EXPRESSION

The affectations of art song are to be avoided, as is a rapid, monotonous manner of chanting. Any exaggerated attempt to express the "meaning" of the text will actually distract from the text itself. All that is required is a moderately paced, steady delivery with sufficient breath support, and clear, crisp enunciation of the words. Observance of this technique will properly express the text and not subordinate it to the music.

VERSION 1.O OF THIS DOCUMENT

THE PRONUNCIATION OF ECCLESIASTICAL LATIN

by David G. Jensen

The Roman pronunciation of Ecclesiastical
Latin, customary since the Nineteenth Century

The Latin alphabet has twenty-five letters:

A, a	F, f	K, k	P, p	U, u		I (i) is often used in place of
B, b	G, g	L, l	Q, q	V, v		J (j), its consonantal form.
C, c	H, h	M, m	R, r	X, x		
D, d	I, i	N, n	S, s	Y, y		K, Y and Z occur only in
E, e	(J, j)	O, o	T, t	Z, z		words derived from Greek.

ACCENT: in a word of two syllables, the accent falls on the first syllable. In a word of three or more syllables, the accent falls on the *penult* (next to last), if that syllable is long; if not, the accent falls on the *antepenult* (second from last). A vowel is long either by nature, marked by an acute accent (´), or by position, preceding two or more consonants. A diphthong is also long.

VOWELS: each vowel, whether long or short, is pronounced crisply and distinctly. Stressed vowels are pronounced as long, and unstressed as short.

DIPHTHONGS: are pronounced as follows:

á = *a* in f<u>a</u>ther; **a** = *a* in c<u>a</u>r

é = *a* in f<u>a</u>te; **e** = *e* in b<u>e</u>t

í = *ee* in r<u>ee</u>d; **i** = *i* in bit

ó = *o* in n<u>o</u>; **o** = *o* in f<u>o</u>r

ú = *u* in t<u>u</u>ne; **u** = *u* in p<u>u</u>t

ae = *a* in f<u>a</u>te

ai, ay = *i* in f<u>i</u>ne

au = *ou* in sh<u>ou</u>t

(**ei** = *e* + i; **eu** = *e* + *u*)

oe = *a* in f<u>a</u>te; (**ou** = *o* + *u*)

y is always pronouced as í, above.

CONSONANTS: b, d, f, k, l, m, n, p, q and v are pronounced as in English.

c is pronounced as *k,* except before a front vowel *(e, i, ae, oe* or *y),* when it is pronounced as *ch,* as in <u>Church</u>.

cc before a front vowel is pronounced *t* + *ch;* e.g., *ecce* = <u>et</u>-<u>che.</u>

ch, which occurs in words of Greek derivation, is always pronounced *k.*

g is hard (<u>g</u>ate), except before a front vowel, when it is soft (<u>g</u>entle).

gn is always pronounced *ny,* as in bar<u>ny</u>ard.

h is silent, except it is pronounced as *k* in *mi<u>h</u>i, ni<u>h</u>il* and their compounds.

j (often written as i) is always pronounced *y,* as in <u>y</u>et.

r is lightly rolled, as it is in Italian.

s is pronounced as *s* in <u>s</u>ee, but it is softened slightly between two vowels.

sc is pronounced as *sk,* except before a front vowel, when it is pronounced *sh,* as in <u>sh</u>ield.

th, which occurs in words of Greek derivation, is always pronounced *t.*

ti before a vowel and following any letter except s, t or x is pronounced *tsee;* otherwise it is pronounced as written.

x is pronounced *ks,* but is softened slightly between two vowels.

xc is pronounced *ksh* before a front vowel; otherwise it is pronounced as written (with a hard c).

z is always pronounced *dz,* as English *ds* in fee<u>ds</u>.

Double consonants are always pronounced distinctly.

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